

Villani Receives Turfgrass Award

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by Linda McCandless

GENEVA, NY: Michael G. Villani, professor of entomology at Cornell University, received the Outstanding Service Award of the Turfgrass Council of North Carolina during the 39th Annual North Carolina Turfgrass Conference & Show, in January. Villani, who specializes in turfgrass and soil insect ecology, has worked at the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station in Geneva, NY, since 1984.

"For many years, Mike has exemplified the type of individual who gives much more than he takes," said Rick Brandenburg, entomology professor at North Carolina State, who presented the award.

"He plans his program to provide the maximum benefit for the overall good of the industry and the people who work within it rather than the individual recognition of the scientist." He noted that "Mike has contributed significantly to turfgrass insect management in the Southeast and North Carolina in particular, through the sharing of his expertise, time, and resources to assist us in our research of white grubs and mole crickets."

Villani and Brandenburg's strong collaborative relationship has led to their joint participation in a number of conferences and workshops as well as co-editorship of *The Handbook of Turfgrass Insect Pests*, a best-seller for the Entomological Society of America.



Suggested caption: Dr. Michael Villani

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Villani, who is highly regarded worldwide as a practicing entomologist, was both pleased and surprised to receive the award. "While we do a fair amount of research in North Carolina, I was surprised that the turfgrass professionals took notice of my efforts there," he said.

"Mike's recent award is another testimony to the huge impact that he has had in the turf field," said entomology department chairman Wendell Roelofs. "His elegant research and extension efforts are only a small part of the contributions that he makes, however. It is his unselfish dedication to interacting with and helping others that makes his contributions both nationally and internationally so special." Roelofs noted that Villani has the uncanny ability "to ask the right questions; motivate, stimulate, and excite others about what they are doing and need to do; find creative solutions to complex problems; and be sensitive and responsive to the needs of the turfgrass clientele."

Villani studies predator/prey and pathogen/host interactions within the soil. He has developed unique radiographic techniques to study soil insect behavior, and developed new IPM strategies to control the insects that invade commercial plantings as well as ornamental and urban landscapes.

"I became interested in studying soil insects in turf for several reasons," said Villani. "First, there is a real need in New York to better understand insect problems in sites where the chance for exposure to the public is great. Second, there has been a real paucity of what might be considered more long term or fundamental research with turfgrass insects that can be accomplished in my lab. Finally, the turfgrass entomology group is a great group to interact with so it is natural to work with people you enjoy."

Villani is quick to share the credit for his many accomplishments with his research group, led by Paul Robbins and Nancy Consolie. "Without them, my world would not function," he said. He also devotes generous amounts of time to graduate and undergraduate students, technicians, visiting scientists, cooperators in Geneva, Cornell and around the world.

Villani received the National Entomological Society (ESA) of America's Award for Urban Entomology in 1997 and the Citation of Merit (their highest award) from the New York State Turfgrass Association in 1999. He is a member of the International Turfgrass Society and the ESA, serves on the Cornell IPM Operating Committee, is chair of the Cornell University Community IPM Working Group, and past chair of the Cornell Ornamentals IPM Working Group. In 1999, he was one of three authors to revise the second edition of *Turfgrass Insects of the United States and*

Canada, the manual of choice among golf courses from Pebble Beach to Silver Creek. He received his B.S. in Liberal Arts from SUNY Stony Brook in 1979, and his Ph.D. in Entomology from North Carolina State in 1984.

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